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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
September 21, 2010

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION, CREDIT,
ENERGY, AND RESEARCH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GENERAL FARM COMMODITIES
AND RISK MANAGEMENT

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, CHAIR

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
INDEPENDENCE AND GLOBAL WARMING

The Honorable Thomas Tidwell
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Nancy Sutley
Chairwoman
Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Chief Tidwell and Chairwoman Sutley:

I'm writing to urge you to respond to the scope and intensity of the mountain pine beetle epidemic in the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) and other areas in the Western United States with an emergency response that is available through alternative arrangements for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

As you know, despite Forest Service action, the current outbreaks of mountain pine beetles continue to pose great threats to the BHNF. These outbreaks are the largest and most intense in recorded history, affecting an estimated 356,000 acres of ponderosa pine in the last 13 years. This epidemic has created the potential for catastrophic fires that threaten communities, forests, watersheds, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and local tourism industries. For instance, the Mt. Rushmore National Monument recently announced that, for the second year in a row, the traditional Independence Day fireworks celebration will not be held because of concern about wildfire danger caused by nearby trees that have been killed by mountain pine beetles.

The scope and intensity of the mountain pine beetle epidemic in the Black Hills and other locations warrant an emergency response. The spread of the epidemic is now accelerating at a dangerous pace, with beetle infested trees showing up in new areas throughout the forest. I believe it's critically important that the Black Hills National Forest be provided with the requisite flexibility in the NEPA planning process to move swiftly to perform sanitation treatments to remove "fresh hit" trees before the beetles spread to even more areas next summer.

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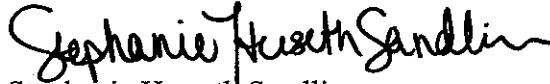
RAPID CITY, SD
343 QUINCY ST., SUITE 102
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As you know, under emergency circumstances, NEPA regulations allow Federal agencies and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to agree upon alternative arrangements for compliance with NEPA in order to allow the agency to act aggressively "to control the immediate impact of the emergency." I firmly believe that the current mountain pine beetle epidemic in the Black Hills and elsewhere in the western United States constitutes an emergency and urge the U.S. Forest Service and CEQ to agree upon alternative arrangements for NEPA compliance and provide our federal forest managers with the flexibility they need to respond effectively to this crisis.

If you have questions or require more information, please contact Jon Loevner (202 225 2801, Jon.Loevner@mail.house.gov) on my staff. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Herseth Sandlin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin
Member of Congress